

SECRET

24 March 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Forced Labor on Wrangel Island

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to clarify the issue of whether there are forced labor camps on Wrangel Island -- a small, obscure Soviet island in the Arctic. Publicity about the subject has been given an aura of legitimacy by Congressman Robert K. Dornan (27th District of California), who has shown an interest in the island.

2. Much of the initial publicity over Wrangel Island stemmed from hearsay information given by Avraham Shifrin, a former Soviet prisoner who was released in 1963 and now lives in Israel. Shifrin told a Senate Subcommittee in 1973 that, as late as 1962, a large forced labor camp on the island held thousands of prisoners -- both regular prisoners of war and some important persons including Raoul Wallenberg, Swedish Consul in Budapest during World War II. The Swedes, unable to locate Wallenberg, recently queried DDO about this camp and Wallenberg's possible presence there.

3. Congressman Dornan, whose interest in Wrangel Island was first prompted by a constituent who vigorously claims to own the island, recently expanded his interest to include the forced labor issue. As quoted in the weekly newspaper, Spotlight (attached), he noted that "the Russians probably still have labor camps on Wrangel Island,"; Dornan found it "most shocking" that "the State Department has known the reports of the labor camps and their presence on U.S. territory since 1973, and nothing has been done---".

4. This Office has thoroughly investigated the matter and concludes that there is not now, and probably never was, a camp on the island. We have substantial evidence to support our conclusion, including aerial photography dating from the early 1950s and satellite photography from the 1960s and 1970s.

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5. We are now engaged in an exhaustive study of the entire Soviet forced labor system and plan to release a finished intelligence report on the subject within a few months. In the meantime we are prepared to show interested parties the results of our research effort.

[ ]

USSR-Europe Branch  
Geography Division, OGCR

Attachment: As Stated

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